

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system which enables service-providers, their agents, retailers and their agents, and consumers to carryout service-related functions along the demand side of the retail chain, comprising:

a central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS for storing a central database of USN/SM/SN/URL links, wherein said USN represents a Universal Service Number assigned to a particular service offered by a service-provider, said SM represents a Service Mark used in connection with said particular service, said SD is representative of one or more Universal Resource Locators pointing to information resources on the WWW relating to said particular service;

a first subsystem for enabling a service-provider's marketing, brand and/or service managers to create and manage a local database of USN/SM/SN/URL links related to the consumer services of the service-provider being offered for sale in both physical and/or electronic marketplaces, and periodically transport said local database of USN/SM/SN/URL links to said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS by electronic data transport techniques, said local database of USN/SM/SN/URL links being managed with a local USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, and selected by the service-provider's marketing, brand and/or service managers so as to create a desired brand image for each said consumer service of the service-provider;

a second subsystem for enabling consumers to access one or more USN/SM/SN/URL links in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, to request and obtain information about a service-provider's consumer service so as to make informed/educated purchases along the demand side of the retail chain; and

one or more subsystems selected from the group consisting of:

a third subsystem for enabling service-providers and their advertising and marketing agents to access one or more USN/SM/SN/URL links in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, to display consumer service advertisements to consumers, at or near the point of purchase or sale within both physical and/or electronic retail shopping environments so as to project the desired brand image to consumers; and

a fourth subsystem for enabling retailers and their marketing and promotional agents to access one or more USN/SM/SN/URL links in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, to promote consumer services to consumers, at or near the point of purchase or sale within both

physical and/or electronic retail shopping environments so as to promote the sale of such services;

wherein said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, said local USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, and said first, second, third and fourth subsystems are each operably connected to the infrastructure of the Internet.

2. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 1, wherein said second subsystem further enables retailer purchasing agents to access one or more USN/SM/SN/URL links in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, to request and obtain information about a service-provider's consumer service so as to make informed/educated purchases along the supply side of the retail chain.

3. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 1, wherein said second subsystem comprises one or more information access and display devices selected from the group consisting of:

a network of barcode-driven/touch-screen-enabled physical CPI kiosks are physically installed within physical retail environments using wireless Internet-connectivity enabling technology, and made accessible to retail shoppers in physical retail environments; and

a network of virtual CPI kiosks enabled by CPIR-enabling Applets symbolically embedded within the HTML-fabric of the WWW (e.g. in EC-based retail stores and catalogs, on-line auction sites, Internet service advertisements), and made accessible to retail shoppers across the Internet.

4. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 3, wherein said second subsystem further comprises a plurality of Web (http) information servers for driving said network of barcode-driven/touch-screen-enabled physical CPI kiosks.

5. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 3, wherein said second subsystem further comprises a plurality of CPIR-enabling Applet servers for driving said network of virtual CPI kiosks enabled

by CPIR-enabling Applets symbolically embedded within the HTML-fabric of the WWW, including retailer-oriented WWW sites served to physical CPI kiosks in a retailer's store.

5        6.    The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 3, wherein said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS further includes a data processing/filtering subsystem for processing data contained within said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS so that each physical CPI kiosk connected to an enabling Web server (and deployed within a particular retailer's store) is capable of displaying only USN/SM/SN/URL links created by service-provider's who (i) sell services in the retailer's  
10       physical store and (ii) have acquired rights and/or privileges (by the retailer) to display services on the retailer's store shelves about which said physical CPI kiosk is physically installed.

15       7.    The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 5, wherein said second subsystem comprises a CPIR-enabling Applet/Servlet Generator for automatically generating, for each USN/SM/SN/URL link record in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, a CPIR-enabling Applet/Servlet, wherein (i) the compiled code associated with the CPIR-enabling Applet/Servlet is loaded onto one of said plurality of CPIR-enabling Applet servers, and (ii) the corresponding CPIR-enabling Applet tag  
20       is loaded within a CPIR-enabling Applet Catalog Web Server for viewing and downloading by retailers, advertisers, auctioneers, et al, and subsequent embedment into the HTML-fabric of WWW.

25       8.    The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 5, wherein said second subsystem comprises a data processing/filtering subsystem (e.g. modules of data processing scripts), integrated with said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, for processing data within said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS so that each virtual CPI kiosk deployed within a particular retailer's electronic store and enabled by at least one said CPIR-enabling Applet server is capable of displaying only USN/SM/SN/URL links created by service-provider's who (i) sell services in the retailer's  
30       electronic store (i.e. e-store) and (ii) have acquired rights and/or privileges (by the retailer) to

display services on the retailer's virtual shelves (e.g. Web pages) about which the virtual kiosk is installed within the HTML-fabric of the retailer's e-store.

5 9. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 1, wherein said first subsystem comprises:

one or more information servers for delivering a suite of information service-providers to service-providers (i.e. vendors) including, the downloading of and providing technical support for software-based EDI-enabled USN/SM/SN/URL link creation, management and transport (LCMT) tools that are made available to registered service-providers, and their agents, as well as to anyone else operating along the retain chain as a vendor of consumer services (which may also include retailers as well); and

10 wherein said software-based EDI-enabled USN/SM/SN/URL LCMT tools enable the service-provider's marketing, brand and/or service managers (and their support personnel) to efficiently carry out USN/SM/SN/URL data-linking and transport operations which are required to build and maintain said local database.

15 10. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 1, wherein said second subsystem comprises a data processing/filtering subsystem for data processing (i.e. filtering) said USN/SM/SN/URL links and data contained in said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, in various ways prior to distribution to consumers, so as to preserve the trust, confidence and goodwill developed between service-providers and retailers in both physical and electronic streams of commerce.

20 11. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 10, wherein said data processing/filtering subsystem involves using information about (i) the service-providers represented (or promoted) by a particular retailer in a particular retail environment, as well as (ii) the rights and/or privileges accorded to service service-providers and/or distributors (i.e. vendors) by retailers with regard to displaying a service-provider's service in a particular aisle of the retailer's store and optionally at a particular shelf location, as well as on a particular Web-page(s) of a retailer's electronic store or

catalog (e.g. virtual aisles) and optionally at a particular location (i.e. virtual shelf location) therealong.

5 12. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 9, wherein said software-based EDI-enabled USN/SM/SN/URL LCMT tools enable a service-provider's marketing, brand and/or managers to create and manage a list of USN/SM/SN/URL links for each consumer service within their service portfolio, store said list of USN/SM/SN/URL links within said local database, realized as a locally managed USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, and electronically transporting said list of  
10 USN/SM/SN/URL links from said locally managed USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS to said central USN/SM/SN/URL RDBMS, for distribution and display to consumers in the form of a USN/SM/SN/URL link display GUI.

15 13. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 4, wherein said third subsystem enables an advertisers (including a retailer, a service-provider or its agent) to buy advertising slots available on particular retailer-deployed barcode-driven physical CPI kiosks (and/or retailer-deployed virtual CPI kiosks) and deliver the short UPC-indexed service advertisements to consumers over physical and/or virtual CPI kiosks in physical and/or electronic retail stores during moments  
20 when consumers are not requesting consumer service related information from said system.

25 14. The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 13, wherein said third subsystem enables advertisers to perform one or more functions selected from the group consisting of: (i) register with the system; (ii) log onto the Advertisement Slot Marketing/Sales/Management Web Site maintained by the system administrator or its designated agent; (iii) view catalogs of physical and/or virtual CPI kiosks deployed within retail shopping environments by retailers, at which a registered advertiser can consider purchasing advertisement slots on service-provider/retailer authorized kiosks; (iv)  
30 purchase advertisement slots on service-provider/retailer authorized physical or virtual) CPI kiosks deployed in physical or electronic retail shopping space; (v) create, deploy and manage advertising campaigns over one or more physical and/or virtual kiosks deployed by retailers in

retail space; and (vi) monitor the performance of kiosk-based advertising campaigns during execution, as required by client demands and prevailing business considerations, using any Web-enabled client subsystem.

5        15.     The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 3, wherein said fourth subsystem enables a promoter (including a retailer, a service-provider or its agent) to create customized service promotion campaigns, containing short UPC-indexed service advertisements, sales prices and aisle/shelf location directions, for presentation over the network of barcode-driven/touch-screen enabled physical CPI kiosks deployed within its retail store, or chain of stores, and later analyze the effectiveness of the campaign by comparing sales data collected at the barcode driven point-of-sale (POS) stations within the same retail stores in which the participating physical CPI kiosks are deployed.

10        16.     The Internet-based consumer service marketing, merchandising and education/information system of claim 3, wherein said fourth subsystem enables promoters to perform one or more functions selected from the group consisting of: (i) register with system; (ii) log onto the Promotion Slot Marketing/Sales/Management Web Site maintained by the system administrator or its designated agent; (iii) view catalogs of physical and/or virtual CPI kiosks deployed within retail shopping environments by retailers, at which a registered promoter can consider purchasing or otherwise acquiring promotion slots on service-provider/retailer authorized kiosks; (iv) purchase or otherwise acquire (service sales) promotion slots on service-provider/retailer authorized physical or virtual kiosks deployed in retail shopping space; (v) create, deploy and manage service promotion campaigns over one or more physical and/or virtual kiosks deployed by retailers (or service-providers) in retail space; and (vi) monitor the performance of kiosk-based promotion campaigns as required by client demands and prevailing business considerations, using any Web-enabled client subsystem.